

Producing safe eggs at home

This advice is intended for egg producers in Victoria who keep fewer than 50 birds (chickens, ducks or quail) and sell eggs for human consumption. It will help you to understand how to produce safe eggs and meet your legal obligations.

Eggs are a nutritious food but have the potential to cause illness as they can become contaminated with bacteria that can cause food poisoning.

Clean, intact, fresh eggs are unlikely to cause a problem. However, if eggs are cracked or dirty, contamination of the internal contents of the egg can occur, and there is a higher risk of illness from consuming the eggs.

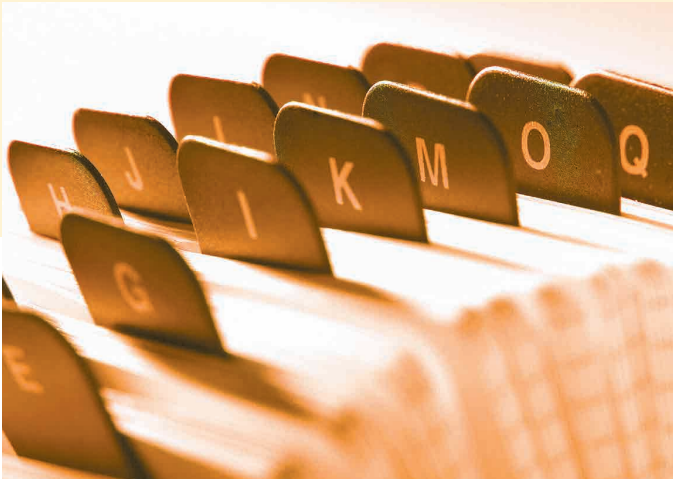
Bacteria that live in dirt, feathers or bird droppings can enter the egg through cracks that are sometimes too fine to see. Once inside the egg, these bacteria quickly multiply to levels that can make people sick. The best way to avoid contaminating your eggs is by limiting bacterial build up in the environment through simple hygiene practices.

As an egg producer, you need to understand how eggs can become contaminated and how to manage these hazards.

Salmonella is the main bacteria associated with eggs. Illness is often more severe in the elderly, very young children and people who are sick or have an impaired immune system. In extreme cases the illness can result in death.

Producers with 50 or more birds should visit the DEPI website at www.depi.vic.gov.au/eggs or contact DEPI Customer Service Centre on 136 186 for information on what you need to do to meet your legal obligations.





Your responsibilities under the law

If you sell eggs for human consumption you must comply with the *Victorian Food Act 1984* and the recently introduced national Primary Production and Processing Standard for Eggs and Egg Product (the standard).

The following advice will help you understand how to produce safe eggs and meet your legal obligations.

Never sell cracked and dirty eggs

Cracked and dirty eggs pose a significant threat to food safety and **must not be sold or supplied for human consumption**.

Make sure the eggs you collect from your birds are as clean as possible. You will reduce the number of dirty eggs if you keep nesting materials clean by changing them often, and by having nesting boxes away from roosting areas in your shed.

Keep records for traceability

Record keeping helps with tracing the source of any outbreaks of food borne illness. You must keep a record of your egg sales to businesses, for example local restaurants, cafés or stores, wholesalers or distributors, or other producers. To have evidence of your egg sales you can keep documents such as invoices, delivery dockets or diary entries that show when and how many eggs you sold to a particular business.

If you sell eggs directly to the public, for example from your farm gate or at a market, you should keep a record of the sales including dates, quantities and place of sale.

If you sell another producer's eggs, make sure they are labelled with the producer's name and address or that you can identify from your records when and where these eggs were sold.

Sale of eggs to the public at a market or any similar location

If you sell your eggs directly to the public from a stall at a market or any similar location, you must:

- register with your council to obtain permission; and
- lodge a Food Act statement of trade with each council in whose district you will be operating. This tells the council where and when you will be trading.

You can do this online at <https://streatrader.health.vic.gov.au>.

For more information read the information at this website, or contact your local council.

Managing the hazards in egg production

As an egg producer, you are responsible for managing the food safety hazards that arise from the time eggs are laid until they leave your control. The advice below describes good practice in egg production and handling. It will help you to manage hazards and ensure the eggs you produce and sell are safe for human consumption.

Looking after your birds

- Keep your birds healthy – provide fresh, high quality feed and clean water daily.
- Isolate sick birds and seek veterinary advice promptly if hens appear sick.
- Discard eggs from birds that appear sick or off their feed.
- If treating birds with a veterinary medicine, check the label and don't consume or sell eggs if there is a withholding period.
- Keep sheds clean – regularly remove manure and broken eggs, and replace nesting material when it is contaminated with bird droppings.



Egg collection

- Collect eggs at least once a day – more often in warmer weather. The less time an egg remains in the nest, the lower the risk of contamination.
- If you come across a nest of eggs that you didn't previously know about, do not sell them – you have no idea how old the eggs are.
- Do not sell or supply cracked or dirty eggs. If an egg is cracked or dirty it is more likely to contain *Salmonella*, which is why it is not permitted to sell these eggs under the standard.

Handling and cleaning eggs

- Wash your hands before and after handling eggs to avoid spreading bacteria.
- Clean lightly soiled eggs with a clean, dry, abrasive cloth.
- Sanitise or dispose of cleaning cloths when you have finished a day's batch of eggs or more frequently if it is soiled.

Wet washing of eggs is not recommended unless a commercial egg washing system is used. If washing conditions are not precisely controlled the protective cuticle can be removed from the eggshell, increasing the likelihood of bacteria entering the egg.

Checking eggs for faults

- Candle eggs and discard those with hairline cracks, thin shells and other visible faults.
- For more information about egg candling or to purchase an egg candling kit contact the Australian Egg Corporation at www.aecl.org, 'contact@aecl.org', or phone (02) 9409 6999.

Candling involves placing eggs in front of a bright light, which penetrates the egg making the contents visible. This technique reveals fine cracks and other faults that cannot be seen otherwise.

Egg packaging and labelling

- Eggs should always be stored and sold in clean and undamaged packaging. Dirty cartons can cause contamination of eggs.
- Labelling of cartons must include at a minimum:
 - your name and full address.
 - a best before date. Thirty five days from date of packing is recommended.
 - a form of identification such as batch number (the best before date can act as your batch number).
- You should not sell your eggs in another egg producer's carton. This would misrepresent who has produced the eggs.



Storing and transporting

- Store eggs so the oldest eggs are used first, and record the best before dates.
- Keep eggs cool during storage and transport – eggs keep best below 20°C. Ideally keep eggs in the fridge. Don't leave eggs in direct sunlight for even short periods, or near equipment that generates heat, for example the back of a fridge, or near a stove.
- Avoid large temperature fluctuations during storage and transport – this can cause condensation on the egg surface, which can permit surface bacteria to move inside the eggshell.
- If you have any doubt about the safety of eggs or have eggs that are past their best before date then throw them away.

More information

Further information on egg production is available at:

- Department of Environment and Primary Industries website (www.depi.vic.gov.au/eggs)
- Department of Health website (www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety)
- Australian Egg Corporation Limited (www.aecl.org)
- Victorian Farmers Federation Egg Group (www.vff.org.au)
- The Primary Production and Processing Standard for Eggs and Egg Product is available on the Food Standards Australia New Zealand website (www.foodstandards.gov.au)

Further information on the care of backyard poultry is available on the Department of Environment and Primary Industries Animal Welfare website (www.depi.vic.gov.au/animalwelfare)

If you would like to receive this information/publication in an accessible format (such as large print or audio) please call the Customer Service Centre on 136 186, National Relay Service/TTY 133 677, or email customer.service@dpi.vic.gov.au.

Published by the Department of Environment and Primary Industries Agriculture and Food Industries Policy, May 2013.

© The State of Victoria 2013.

This publication is copyright. No part may be reproduced by any process except in accordance with the provisions of the *Copyright Act 1968*.

Authorised by the Department of Environment and Primary Industries, 1 Spring Street, Melbourne 3000.

ISBN 978-1-74326-425-6 (Print)
ISBN 978-1-74326-426-3 (Online)

Disclaimer

This publication may be of assistance to you but the State of Victoria and its employees do not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from you relying on any information in this publication.

For more information about DEPI go to www.depi.vic.gov.au or phone the Customer Service Centre on 136 186.